

ADWEEK

SEPTEMBER 26, 2022

ADWEEK +
ADCOLOR'S
BEACON
AWARD
WINNER

RAE OF LIGHT

TACKLING
HOLLYWOOD
ON HER
OWN TERMS,
ISSA RAE
CRAFTS
INCLUSIVE,
EMPOWERED
ENTERTAINMENT.

**BY SHANNON
MILLER**



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16

BEACON AWARD

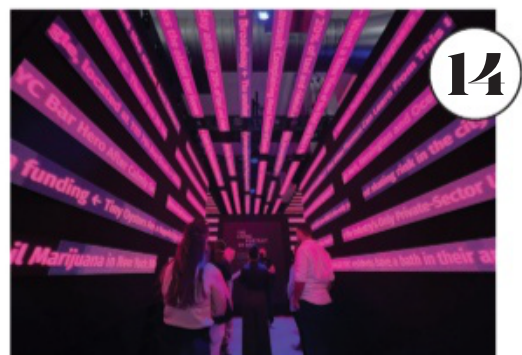
Issa Rae is bringing creatives of color along on her meteoric rise.



13

DATA

How beauty brands talk about sustainability so customers listen.



14

SPACES

Citizens Bank enters the New York market with a tribute to the city.



24

PERSPECTIVE

The makeup industry had to play catch-up to Fenty Beauty.

COVER PHOTOGRAPHY BY
ADRIENNE RAQUEL FOR ADWEEK

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THE WEEK IN MEDIA AND MARKETING

Upfront

STAY TUNED

QUESTIONS LINGER ABOUT AD-SUPPORTED NETFLIX.
BY BILL BRADLEY AND CATHERINE PERLOFF

Netflix hasn't publicly announced a rollout date for its ad-supported tier, but it's been quietly telling buyers to prepare for a Nov. 1 debut, which means marketers are feeling the pressure of the streaming behemoth's eagerly anticipated offering.

As media buyers race to lock in their commitments by the end of the month, they (anonymously) talked to Adweek about the intense negotiations.

Several insiders felt Netflix's initial \$65 CPM was more of a starting point than an ultimatum. But negotiations may depend on how much wiggle room buyers have, as Netflix is looking for up to \$5 million

per brand and yearlong upfront commitments.

Initially, the streamer won't offer much beyond the cachet of the Netflix name, having no third-party measurement and minimal targeting. However, Netflix is also offering a rare bit of transparency in the streaming space, including the knowledge of what shows ads are running against after the fact, sources said.

The streamer expects around 426,000 subscribers for its rollout and 13 million by Q3, according to insiders. But with no consumer marketing yet, the introduction will determine "whether this is a couple of million subscriber scale to start, or tens of millions," one buyer said.

CREATIVITY



The move toward making media and marketing more accessible and inclusive is growing internationally. In Finland, McDonald's launched a music video for its jingle "Something Bigger (I'm Lovin' It)" with sign language from deaf rapper Signmark. Developed by Nord DDB, the initiative aims to raise awareness of the issues most important to the deaf community, and it was produced as part of McDonald's "Togetherness" platform for equity and inclusivity. —Stephen Lepitak



BIG NUMBER

25%

ECOMMERCE
SALES WILL
MAKE UP A
QUARTER OF
GLOBAL RETAIL
SALES BY 2027,
ACCORDING
TO A STUDY BY
WPP'S GROUPM

BRANDS



CREATE HEALTH

It took Mario Chamorro 10 months to help develop creative wellness app Oye with reggaeton superstar J Balvin and Patrick Dowd. But it only took him a few minutes of using it to help his mother open up about her mental health.

Oye, which means "listen" in Spanish, was created with Gen Z in mind and centers on "creative wellness," the idea that people can work through their emotions with creative actions, encouraging users to track their feelings and create art to stimulate personal growth.

They can also watch content—specifically created for the Latin American market—tailored to how they're feeling, whether it's a talk from a sex therapist or a video encouraging people to twerk out their insecurities and have fun. —Tiffany Moustakas

MOOD BOARD

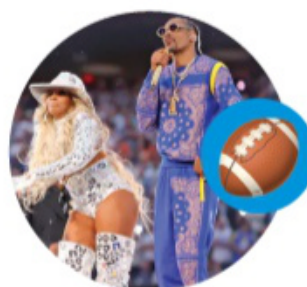
The Week in Emojis



HYUNDAI AND BTS
DROP A WORLD CUP
2022 SONG ABOUT
SUSTAINABILITY



LOS ANGELES TOURISM
RECRUITS STEVE AOKI
TO PROMOTE 'THE CITY
OF DREAMS'



APPLE MUSIC
WILL TAKE OVER AS
SPONSOR OF THE SUPER
BOWL HALFTIME SHOW

TALENT POOL

CHERYL THUESDAY

FROM POSTERS TO ADS TO LGBTQ+ KIDS' BOOKS, THIS ILLUSTRATOR HAS DRAWN IT ALL. BY LUZ CORONA

Some people know their calling from a very early age. In fact, as illustrator Cheryl Thuesday puts it, she “really can’t remember when I wasn’t passionate about art.”

Growing up in New Jersey, Thuesday said her family supported her passion with art supplies and museum visits. She went on to hone her skills and found her love of illustration at the School of Visual Arts in New York.

While that beginning was direct enough, Thuesday’s career journey into marketing took a nontraditional route.

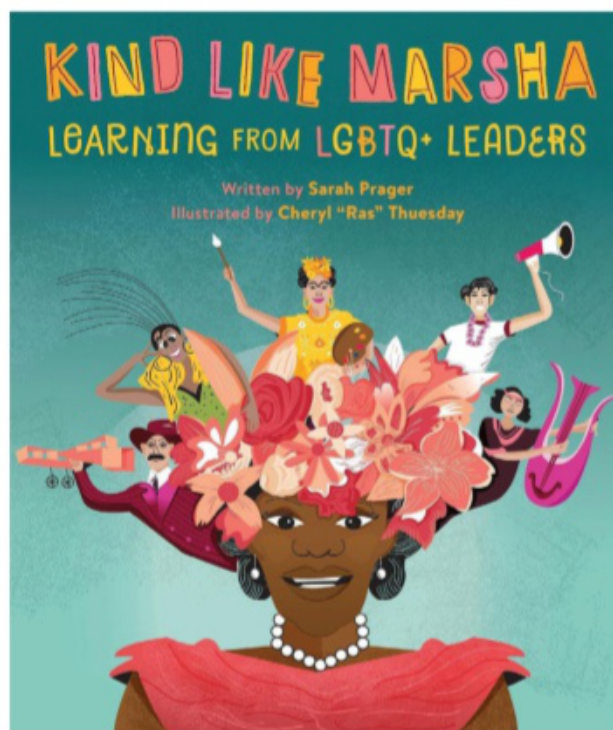
After graduation, she headed to Washington, D.C. Naturally falling into the city’s grassroots art scene through friends and other creatives in her circle, Thuesday earned a reputation for her eye-catching flyers and posters promoting spoken word poetry shows and gallery exhibits, eventually going on to showcase her own work at some of the same venues.

She got her foot in the door of the brand business when a friend reached out about freelance opportunities at thelab production company. That turned into working with brands including Hennessy and Wild Turkey, laying the foundation for her marketing career. Her work has since appeared in The New York Times, and her clients include Adobe as well as WeTransfer’s WePresent. At the latter company, she illustrated a series exploring the history of Black folklore.

That project took her in a new direction, one that was more personal. Thuesday, who is a lesbian, found herself wanting to teach the world, especially the next generation, about these stories and beyond. In August, her illustrations gave life to a children’s nonfiction picture book by Sarah Prager called *Kind Like Marsha: Learning From LGBTQ+ Leaders*.

Kind Like Marsha was a big step for Thuesday, bringing her into a place where she was able to illustrate in a more individualized way compared to client work. “For a long time, I wasn’t comfortable exploring this aspect of my life in my work,” she said. “But eventually, it became necessary to showcase our community during this bleak time of LGBTQ+ folks enduring bans and homophobia.

“I didn’t see this coming—going from campaigns to editorial to children’s books,” Thuesday said. And with the political climate getting more hostile for LGBTQ+ communities, “it’s important to share those stories, not to just adults but to our kids also.”



BIG MISTAKE

Early in her career, Thuesday overcommitted on a project. “I told this company that I can do it in a certain time frame, and there was no way I would be able to do it,” she recalled.

HOW SHE GOT THE GIG

The publisher contacted Thuesday to gauge her interest in illustrating *Kind Like Marsha* after seeing and liking her previous work for NPR, Adobe Education and personal pieces in her portfolio.

LESSON LEARNED

While climbing the career ladder requires a certain amount of faking it till you make it, “You have to know your own boundaries,” Thuesday advised.

PRO TIP

It’s not about selling yourself all the time. “Just be organic,” she said. “Once they see you’re trying to push your stuff, they’re not [interested]. They want to know that you’re there for them, too.”



THE INDUSTRY'S BRIGHTEST BEACON

FROM PULLING OFF THE RARE YOUTUBE-TO-LINEAR
PIVOT TO ENACTING LASTING DEI CHANGE IN
HOLLYWOOD, THERE'S NOTHING ISSA RAE CAN'T DO.

When I joined Adweek seven-and-a-half years ago to cover the TV industry, media companies were desperately trying to crack the digital video space. I've lost track of the number of NewFronts events I attended where legacy networks touted their new digital divisions and trotted out a YouTube star du jour they were confident would bring the same buzz to their own fledgling platforms.

Unsurprisingly, very few of those early efforts broke out. Most of those personalities were never seen again onstage—and in many cases, the upstart platforms met the same fate. As Hollywood learned the hard way, digital success did not translate to

more traditional outlets.

At least, not until Issa Rae came along. Her web series *Awkward Black Girl* put her on the map back in 2011, but she pulled off the rare pivot to linear via her critically acclaimed HBO series *Insecure*, one of the best comedies of the last decade.

But an even more impressive feat is what Rae has done since. (And no, I'm not just talking about her compelling follow-up series, HBO Max's *Rap Sh!t*, which was recently renewed for Season 2.) She's made Hollywood bend to her will instead of the opposite and is enacting lasting changes that will resonate for decades to come.

That's why Rae was the clear choice to be Adweek and Adcolor's fourth annual Beacon Award honoree. As always, the award spotlights noteworthy personalities who have used their considerable platforms to change the status quo in their quest for diversity, equity and inclusion. And that has been Rae's M.O. from the start. She mandates that any set she works on must be 60% diverse, with no exceptions. If partners and brands won't play ball, she won't step on the field.

"I say no so quickly, and I say no to a lot," Rae told Adweek creative and inclusion editor Shannon Miller in our cover story. "If it's an opportunity to benefit other creators or put money in people of color's pockets, then I tend to listen with an open ear."

Unlike some of her peers, Rae does more than talk about an inclusive entertainment industry—she's actually building it, between groundbreaking shows like *Rap Sh!t* and brand partnerships with the likes of CoverGirl and Madewell that are focused on boosting underrepresented creatives and groups. This year's Beacon Award winner is indeed shining brightly.



Jason Lynch
Editor
@jasonlynch

RAE: ADRIENNE RAQUEL

TRENDS YOU NEED TO KNOW Insights

Walls of Demand is a nationwide art project made up of murals featuring Parkland, Fla., shooting victim Joaquin Oliver and stats about gun violence.



TARGET DEMOGRAPHIC

GUN SAFETY ADVOCATES ARE PUSHING BACK ON FIREARMS MARKETING THAT USES LOOPHOLES TO REACH ITS OFTEN YOUNGER AUDIENCE. **BY CAT WEAVER**

Gun advertising once evoked groups of hunters and father-son trips into the great outdoors. But over the last 40 years, the weekend sportsmen demographic shrunk as a marketing target for brands such as rifle maker Winchester.

Now gunmakers have moved away from the wholesome images of unwrapping a rifle from under the Christmas tree. That advertising has been replaced by increasingly darker messages about the benefits of armed self-protection against home invaders and an emphasis on patriotism amid the perceived danger of an eroding constitutional right to arms. Through it all are mocking

hints that a prospective gun owner's masculinity is at stake.

While those messages have been gaining speed for decades, they've switched gears to social media as firearms manufacturers have adapted to changing times. In response, communities, activists and congressional representatives have started pushing back.

"There are already 400 million guns in our country. The gun market is overly saturated. But these manufacturers need more and more gun sales to drive profits," said Shannon Watts, founder of Moms Demand Action, a grassroots organization inspired to action by the mass shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School. "So in many cases,

they turn to fearmongering to gin up sales or pitch aggressive marketing that is overly militaristic, masculine and anti-government. It's a far cry from the responsible hunter and sportsman marketing of a generation ago."

Moms Demand Action, along with Students Demand Action, is an affiliate of Everytown, a gun violence prevention organization. Working with its network of nearly 10 million supporters, the organization has filed several complaints with the Federal Trade Commission, citing deceitful and predatory practices used by Smith & Wesson and Daniel Defense, two leading gun manufacturers. (Neither manufacturer responded to a request for comment by time of publication.)

Everytown and MDA's complaint against Daniel Defense claims the manufacturer is violating the FTC Act, which prohibits "false and deceptive advertising." MDA contends that ads for Daniel Defense's AR-15 unfairly imply that its products are suitable for use by civilians in "offensive, combat-like missions." The FTC complaint also cites "violent and militaristic imagery appealing particularly to the thrill-seeking and impulsive tendencies of susceptible teens and young men" and points to the consequences, such as school shootings.

The complaint was sparked by the May 24 school shooting at Robb Elementary in Uvalde, Texas, when an 18-year-old shooter used a Daniel

Defense AR-15 style M4 V7 rifle to kill 19 children and two teachers, and injure 17 more children.

MDA's complaint against Smith & Wesson claims that it used deceptive marketing to associate its weapons with those of the U.S. military in an attempt to raise its profile. A follow-up to this complaint added that the company was using influencers to tout its products, flouting the FTC's rules against advertising on social media. With pro-gun influencers, posts might show them posing with their guns or using them.

Plugging loopholes

While Everytown has relied on the unassailable image of moms to press the public and government officials to curtail the use of firearms, the use of motherhood goes both ways. Indeed, relying on influencer marketing has become a common way for gun companies to skirt FTC rules and restrictions.

"Glock moms" have gained prominence in promoting the sale of high-powered semi-automatic weapons. Online magazine Air Mail recently put the spotlight on Charissa Littlejohn, who runs a gun-holster company in California and has more than 350,000 Instagram followers. A recent post featured a wide array of Taran Tactical Innovations firearms and magazine extensions. While the post wasn't listed as paid, the more than 5,000 likes it got served as a strong endorsement of the brand.

In July, California Gov. Gavin Newsom signed a law banning the marketing of guns to minors by manufacturers and others in the firearms industry. The law, which attracted legal challenges by gun rights groups immediately after passing, is aimed at weapons manufacturers accused of flouting the rules created by platforms such as Facebook, Google and YouTube. Those online players block ads that overtly promote the sale of guns on their sites.

Still, there is no prohibition for user reviews or hobbyist chats that recommend gun sales.

Everytown released a report in August detailing how online spaces like YouTube provided not only extremist ideological motivation for the white supremacist mass shooter in Buffalo, NY, in May, but also the tactical and technical know-how to carry out his attack.

"For too long, companies like YouTube have given a platform to content that goes far beyond practical and safe firearms training for gun owners, and instead provides instructional content to illegally modify

weapons, build ghost guns and train in offensive firearms tactics," said Justin Wagner, senior director of investigations at Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund. "Social media companies must do their part to disarm hate, and that starts with enforcing their own firearm guidelines on their platforms."

Gun brands are advertising now more than ever and have found their success lies in the margins: A narrowly defined, enthusiastic demographic can find gun marketing appeals in gun magazines, on specialized sites and, yes, on social media.

That is, until recently.

In mid-September, a dozen Democratic U.S. senators led by Richard Blumenthal, Edward J. Markey and Chris Murphy signed a letter calling on FTC chairperson Lina Khan to investigate and consider regulating "unfair and deceptive" advertising by gunmakers. Specifically citing Daniel Defense and the mass shooting in Uvalde, the letter echoes pleas made by Everytown.

"The industry regularly and routinely makes false and misleading

Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Fla.

Not long after, the organization Change the Ref was born. Through it, the Olivers work with ad agencies including Leo Burnett to create "strategic urban art interventions" that will sway public sentiment and "reduce the influence of the NRA on the electoral process on the federal level," Manuel Oliver said. (Leo Burnett did not reply to a request for comment by time of publication.)

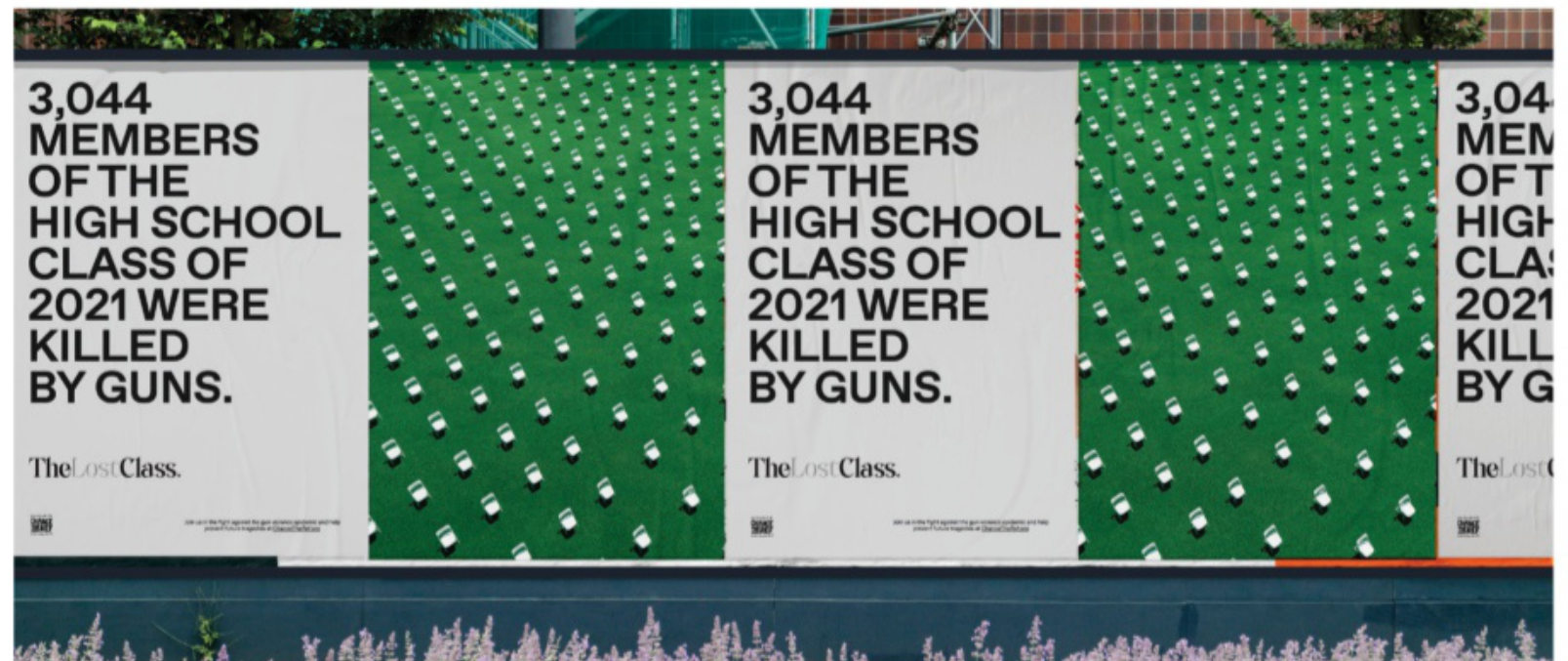
Manuel Oliver often speaks of his son in the present tense, inspired by the activist soul of Joaquin, who was only 17 when he was killed. In fact, Change the Ref is named for a bit of wisdom the teen imparted a couple of weeks before he was murdered. He'd gotten into a dispute with a referee in a basketball game where it seemed like he was siding with the other team, and as a result, Joaquin was kicked out. "We will never get a fair game with that guy," he had said. "We need to change the ref."

After the shooting, the Olivers were talking with their friends about

"The Lost Class," which was created with Leo Burnett Chicago and aired during the 2021 Super Bowl. The ad swept the Grand Clio awards, winning in four categories: direct, experience/activation, integrated campaign and print. The Omnicom agency also won a Black Cube honor at the 101st ADC Annual Awards, which is part of The One Club for Creativity.

Executed in two parts, the stunt appeared to dupe David Keene, two-time NRA president, and John Lott, an economist and gun rights activist, into giving graduation speeches at the fictional, and ironically named, James Madison University. Each man was unaware the other had been invited and blithely "rehearsed" a speech to empty chairs that represented the students lost to gun violence that year. The effect, as these gun industry leaders spoke to the lost souls about their futures, was bone-chilling.

But was it effective? According to Leo Burnett, the ad reached 50 million impressions, received a full segment on The Rachel Maddow Show and garnered 41,000 signatures in support



Agency Leo Burnett worked with Change the Ref on its **'The Lost Class'** campaign to shine a spotlight on the 3,044 high school graduates who didn't get to see graduation day due to gun violence.

representations about firearm safety and unfairly exploits children and teenagers through unfair and deceptive marketing practices, including targeting teenagers, particularly young men, with advertising for military-style weapons," the senators wrote. "Time and again, these practices have had deadly consequences."

Fighting advertising with advertising

For Manuel and Patricia Oliver, the battle began Feb. 14, 2018, when their son Joaquin was killed along with 14 of his fellow students and three staff members at Marjory

the NRA's unfair advantage and were reminded of Joaquin's analysis. So long as the NRA had a chokehold on American politics, they'd never get a fair chance at regulating the gun industry.

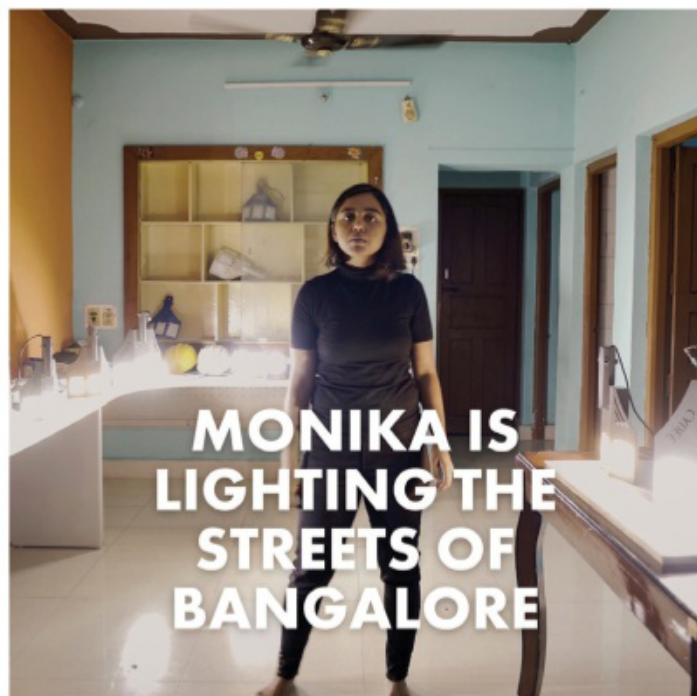
To that end, Change the Ref has become something of a creative factory, with artist and musician collaborations and audacious stunts. Manuel Oliver happens to be an artist himself, having created a billboard image with Joaquin's face accompanied by calls to action and an interactive performance called the Walls of Demand.

However, Change the Ref is perhaps most famous for its campaign

of a petition on Change.org demanding universal background checks.

However, on an emotional level, Manuel Oliver believes the case was made to the wider public.

"At the end of the day, it's about my son and the rest of the victims," he said. "Slowly, one campaign at a time, we will reach that point where brands will understand that you can also have financial success by being part of this. This is a Super Bowl commercial. The quality of the production, the message, the importance of the message, the meaningful side that we are addressing of the time. It's such an important thing to put out there."



MONIKA IS
LIGHTING THE
STREETS OF
BANGALORE



NICO PRODUCES
FERTILIZER
WITHOUT
EMISSIONS



MARCUS TURNS
OCEAN WAVES
INTO ELECTRICITY

Pique Action's
videos feature the
wins in climate
change news.

THE SOLUTION TO DOOMISM

PIQUE ACTION IS USING OPTIMISM AND SCIENCE TO BE A SOURCE OF INSPIRATION IN CLIMATE CHANGE DISCUSSIONS. **BY KATHRYN LUNDSTROM**

When Bo Burnham released a song encapsulating the absurdity of middle-class existence while attempting to process all the concurrent crises of 2020, it's unlikely he intended to create the soundtrack to climate doomism.

"That Funny Feeling," a song from the comedian's hourlong special *Inside*, proved especially relatable, eventually becoming a popular TikTok sound used in despairing videos chronicling climate disasters. "I like to call [summer 2021] the 'summer of climate doom,'" Alaina Wood, scientist, climate communicator and host for media company Pique Action, told Adweek.

While some argue that distress is a rational response to the realities humanity is facing due to climate change, some research has shown it doesn't actually lead to people doing anything about it. And given the necessity of large-scale action to slow global warming and mitigate its impacts, Wood worries this feeling of hopelessness only further delays desperately needed solutions. Climate-centric media company Pique Action wants to be the inspirational antidote to doomism.

Pique Action was founded in October 2021 by filmmaker Kip Pastor to tell short-form stories of climate solutions, calling itself "the opposite of doomscrolling." By July, the group had raised \$1 million in pre-seed funding. In addition to venture capital, Pique funds its content production by making ads for values-aligned companies like

Activate, a nonprofit that connects scientists creating climate solutions with funding for their work.

An alternative to doom and 'hopium'

Pique Action offers an alternative to two extremes within climate-related discourse, both of which can lead to inaction: the feelings of anxious, helpless nihilism inadvertently triggered by climate coverage aiming to scare people into action (aka climate doom), and the comfortable apathy that results from exaggerating the possibilities of technology to reverse climate change (aka "hopium"). "We're all tired of seeing polar bears float out to sea, and melting glaciers, and flooding and fires—and it's not galvanizing anyone," Pastor said. "We believe that telling human stories of innovation and solutions can help change the overall narrative."

Recently, Pique launched a series of local and regional climate success stories. Wood covers those stories from her home in the Appalachian Mountains, occasionally from her bright-blue porch swing surrounded by trees, in rural Tennessee.

In addition to Wood, who joined in the early days of the company's existence, Canada-based climate activist Hazel Thayer and sustainability influencer Dez McGill, based in Oregon, also create short-form videos across TikTok, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn and YouTube focused on climate

solutions. The company also produces documentary-style short films highlighting climate tech innovators.

Finding answers in fundamentals

But really, this all goes back to the fundamentals of marketing, according to Christie Nordhielm, marketing professor at Georgetown University. "There are really specific psychological principles that come into play," she said. "[It's] called promotion or prevention focus."

A promotion-focused ad tells people good things will happen if they engage in a certain action, whether that's doing, buying or refraining from doing something, Nordhielm explained. Meanwhile, a prevention-focused ad warns that bad things will happen if they do one of those things.

"The market leader a lot of times will do prevention marketing to maintain the status quo," Nordhielm explained. For example, oil and gas companies saying renewables are less reliable than continuing to burn fossil fuels.

When it comes to urging climate action that requires proactive behavior change, some research has shown that promotion-focused messaging, similar to what Pique Action is creating, is more effective than fear-based messaging. Rather than inspiring action, a 2009 study found people responded with "denial, apathy, avoidance and negative associations."

Feelings are hard

Still, human emotions are complex, and so is the issue of climate change.

"There's a pretty pervasive sense of a desire to do something [among the public]," said Ben Franta, senior research fellow in climate litigation at the University of Oxford, "but a feeling of helplessness and not knowing what to do."

In part, that's because "people's imaginations are limited in terms of what they think they can do [about climate change]," he added.

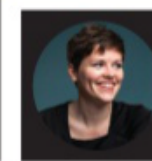
That paradox is also explained by some foundational marketing principles, according to Nordhielm. Specific proposed actions are more motivating than vague calls to do something, she said, and narrative storytelling, like what Pique Action does, is stickier than facts. For Wood, repetition is a key part of her daily life as a scientist and climate communicator on social media, especially during 2021's summer of climate doom. "I get flashbacks of having to debunk video after video," she said. "Every day it was like, 'It's not too late, please don't think it's too late!'"

This is the third installment of a three-part Insights series on how advertising is being used to spur climate action.

PART 1 The quest to build an army of climate activists.

PART 2 How a coalition of agencies is cutting through politics to push for better climate policy.

PART 3 Combating climate doomism with solutions-focused content.



KATHRYN LUNDSTROM IS ADWEEK'S SUSTAINABILITY EDITOR. PREVIOUSLY, SHE WROTE ABOUT POLITICS FOR THE DAILY DONUT AND ANALYZED POLICY AT THE TEXAS CAPITOL. @KLUNDSTER

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Kevin *Pilot and Gastric Lymphoma Cancer Survivor*
Photo by Andrew Eccles

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Faux-chella
Absolut.Land, the Coachella-themed metaverse activation, garnered more than 1.5 billion impressions in the first six days.

Diversifying the Metaverse

PURPOSE-LED BRANDS HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO CHANGE THE VIRTUAL WORLD'S ACTIVATIONS. **BY EMMY LIEDERMAN**

This year, Roberto Max Salas transported 30,000 guests to Coachella. Salas, co-founder and CEO of creative agency Young Hero, knows the average person can't afford a ticket, so instead he brought the music and art festival experience to the metaverse. The activation, which was created in partnership with media shop UEG, promoted client Absolut Vodka with a high-tech dance floor, open bar and Pride-themed, genderless clothing. According to the agency, the experience set an impression record on gaming platform Decentraland.

Absolut.Land, which garnered more than 1.5 billion impressions in the first six days, proves that inclusion in the metaverse isn't just a thoughtful gesture but also a business imperative. It also speaks to the growing use of the metaverse as a purpose-driven experience rather than an aimless pastime. According to Heather Healy, whose company has worked with Roblox to design accessible playground equipment for users with disabilities, an opportunity exists for agencies and brands to create activations that work toward a greater good.

Joaquin Oliver, one of the 17 victims of the 2018 Parkland, Fla., school shooting, turned 22 on Roblox this year. He celebrated his birthday with

a Denzel Curry concert, a few rounds of basketball and a reminder of the state of gun violence in America. The ongoing activism activation, which was powered by Melon, emphasized that social justice in the metaverse breeds business results. As of mid-September, it had garnered 7.6 million plays.

The messages behind these types of activations point to the need for brands to act with intention and purpose when finding their footing in the space. One-off activations that promote a new sneaker might generate buzz, but to maintain longevity in the metaverse, marketers must set themselves apart by making commitments to diversity, equity and inclusion. The space might easily morph into a more technologically forward rendition of Fortnite or Call of Duty where users go to waste time, but if the right brands come prepared with purpose-driven messages, it could challenge biases and offer educational value.

"The metaverse can be painted harshly in the press," said Healy, who is the svp of partnerships and operations at gaming platform Melon. "But when we allow the metaverse to truly serve as this destination where the youth can exist without borders and physically-constructed identities, that's really when it thrives."

'People can start exploring their identities without the pressures of doing that in real life. It can be therapeutic.'

Roberto Max Salas, co-founder and CEO, Young Hero

Inspiring interest

A study from the Entertainment Software Association found that the gamer demographic largely spills over into the metaverse, with 73% of users being white. But through events like concerts and shopping activations, the metaverse has the opportunity to attract a more diverse audience that has interests beyond gaming.

For instance, Alo Yoga, a clothing retailer that advocates for inclusion in the metaverse, brought mindfulness, meditation and fashion to Roblox, receiving 51.5 million visits, with 59 million pieces of clothing worn by avatars.

"To make sure it's not just

gamers, we need to create spaces that have a more universal appeal," said Stephanie Fried, CMO at entertainment platform Fandom.

Producing meaningful activations

While some worry the metaverse is a breeding ground for cyberbullying and hate speech, Salas sees it as a secure platform for users to play with gender expression and identity.

"Particularly for kids who are gender fluid or in the questioning stage, Web3 is a great platform," Salas said. "People can start exploring their identities without the pressures of doing that in real life. It can be therapeutic."

Culture 3.0, a Web3 extension of agency Cashmere, found that marginalized members of Gen Z are twice as likely as white-passing Gen Zers to design their avatars to look like themselves when options are available. According to Cashmere co-founder and chairman Ted Chung, the metaverse inspires authentic expression, leaving a significant opportunity for marketers and developers to offer a wide range of avatar options.

"We need to make sure that customization, and affordability of that customization, is accessible and representative of all groups," Chung said.

Putting the right people to work

Shutterstock is doing exactly that by championing inclusion behind the scenes, scouting diverse artists to create virtual experiences through its Diversity in 3D program. Participants receive perks including a dedicated account manager, 100% royalty rates and personalized content briefs.

According to Pedro Rodriguez, svp of business growth and transformation and head of chapter and verse at Horizon Media, the best way to advocate for inclusion in Web3 is to invite marginalized communities to do the work. According to Rodriguez, promoting inclusion means convincing diverse students and creators that a career path in Web3 is for them.

Brands and agencies have a responsibility to provide greater access to this technology, as participation in the metaverse comes with hefty startup costs. "By bringing additional minds to the table, we're at the right point to solve for inclusion together," he added.



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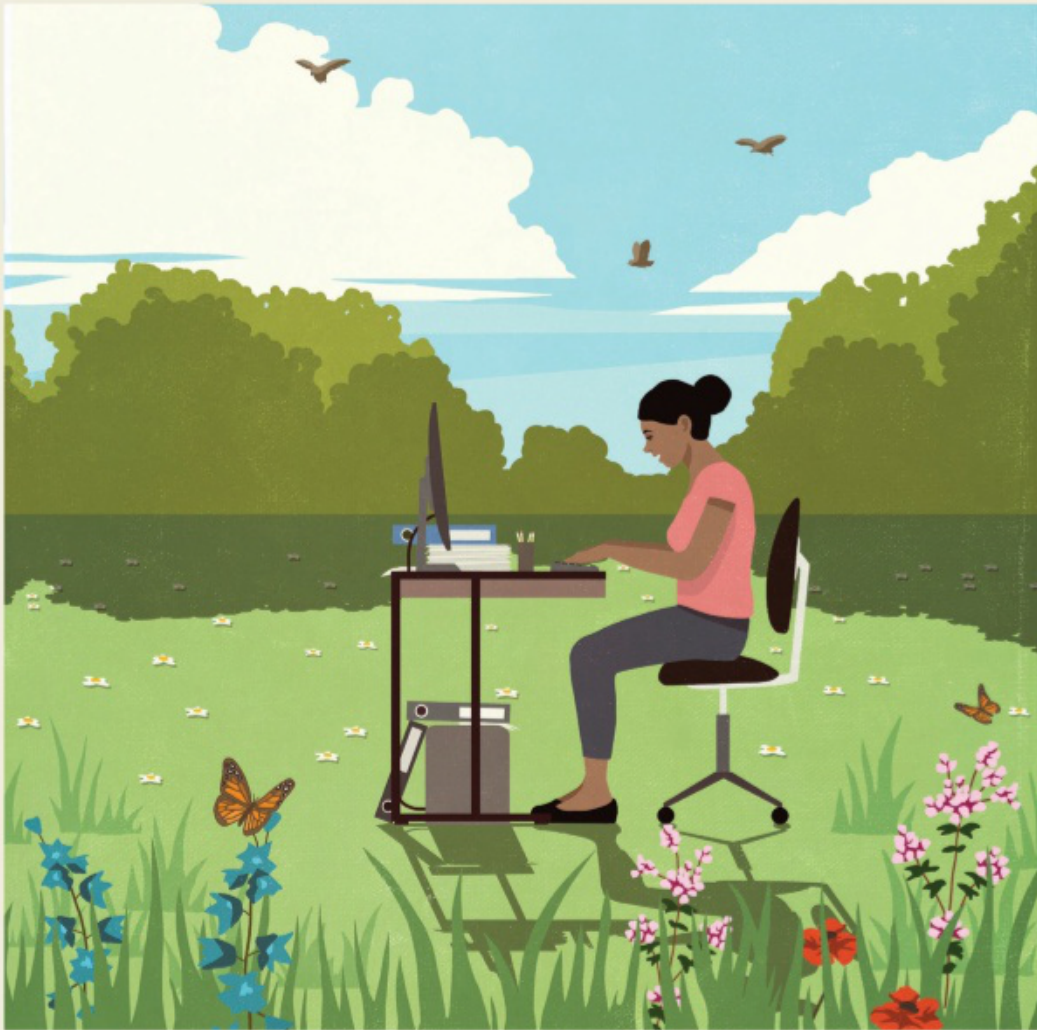


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A Culture of Employee Health

HOW TO TAKE CARE OF YOUR TEAM IN TOUGH TIMES. **BY AMY SMALL AND JILLIAN INGRAM**

Advertising has always been a high-pressure industry, notorious for long hours, tight deadlines and huge client expectations. The tumult of the last few years hasn't made things any easier. Overworked employees may be grinding harder than ever, wrestling with fears of budget cutbacks and job security.

If there's one positive from all this upheaval, it's that more organizations are recognizing that ensuring the health of their businesses must also be about supporting the individuals who make it all possible.

But employee well-being can't simply be solved with one program. Creating and operationalizing a culture that's centered on employee health, support and development requires a holistic strategy with ideas and investments from everyone involved.

Involve staff in setting the direction

While most big agency initiatives come from the top down, it's important to make sure they're aligned with the real needs of the agency's people.

Surveys are great for gathering widespread qualitative and quantitative data about how employees feel and what's working and what's not. Steering committees or employee resource groups (ERGs) can also help gather suggestions and input companywide.

Invest in ongoing mental health education

Many agencies have already started to build mental health training into onboarding plans and annual training budgets.

For long-term impact, consider giving everyone a common language to communicate what they're feeling, as well as permission to do so openly and honestly. From there, think about offering frequent topical training sessions, providing repetition and reinforcement.

Additionally, specialized training that teaches managers how to spot potential mental health struggles within their teams takes the pressure off individuals to reach out on their own. It gives managers tools to

support their teams and prevent burnout before it starts.

Create a culture of psychological safety

It's important for employees to feel safe bringing up challenges or ideas for the workplace at large. One way to achieve this is by having structured formats for one-on-ones that include more personally supportive conversations and requests for constructive feedback to build connection and trust.

Including regular conversations and practices in all-staff meetings, such as an energy and baggage inventory, can reinforce that your agency is serious about being more supportive.

Provide managerial support

Many agency folks get promoted into management positions because they excelled as individual contributors. But they may not have the skill set—or desire—to take on that added responsibility.

Before promotions, have honest discussions about what being a manager within your company means. If someone's not excited by these facets of their potential new role, consider alternative growth paths. And if they do want to make the jump, invest in the training they need to succeed.

Prioritize professional growth and flexibility

If an employee doesn't feel like they can learn and grow at work, it will be difficult for them to feel like their contributions matter. Providing the opportunity and financial resources to take outside classes, courses and certifications will give them a greater sense of purpose and control over their careers.

If someone decides they want to move into a different career path altogether, be open to having those conversations. It goes a long way toward showing more investment in that employee's individual happiness than simply adhering to an org chart.

Examine and retool business practices

In advertising, so much of how we approach our work is dictated by our clients: their needs, their budgets, their timelines. When we fail to set clear boundaries or expectations, we're setting our teams up for stress, burnout and resentment.

Several agencies have already started saying no to free spec work in pitches, and employees are happier and more productive because of it. Whether it's redefining client expectations or internal policies, like flexible work hours and locations or expanded PTO, these foundational changes can go a long way toward improving morale.

Hold accountability

Improving employee well-being is a continuous journey. Once you've put some of these approaches and practices in place, it's important to conduct ongoing surveys and evaluations to ensure efforts are paying off.

But don't expect to get everything right the first time. These things take time. If your survey comes back and shows more improvement in some areas of your workplace than others, get curious about why. Share the results with employees and ask for more feedback or ideas.

Being transparent about progress shows full commitment to changing for the better, and that's a giant step in the right direction for everyone involved.



Specs

Claim to fame Jillian Ingram is the vp of operations at Media Cause. She also serves as program director of the RiseUP Marketing Fellowship, a nonprofit-backed professional development program for diverse talent.

Base San Francisco



Specs

Claim to fame Amy Small is the evp, creative and brand at Media Cause, a mission-driven digital agency that helps nonprofits accelerate their impact. She also serves as managing director of the RiseUP Marketing Fellowship.

Base Atlanta

Making Sustainability Chic

HOW BEAUTY BRANDS TALK ABOUT GREEN INITIATIVES SO CUSTOMERS LISTEN. **BY EVA KIS**

The global beauty industry is worth \$511 billion. Yet even with the threat of climate change looming over everyone, sustainability issues still account for less than 6% of online mentions by beauty brands.

On a hopeful note, that figure is actually a 47% increase over sustainability-related mentions compared to 2021.

These are just some of the results in a new report by AI-driven visual analysis platform Eyecue Insights, which looked at more than 160,000 Instagram posts across 130 beauty brands.

The majority of sustainability-related topics—four out of five—relate to packaging, and these conversations predictably see a spike around

conservation-themed holidays, especially Earth Day, when mentions double to 10% of social chatter.

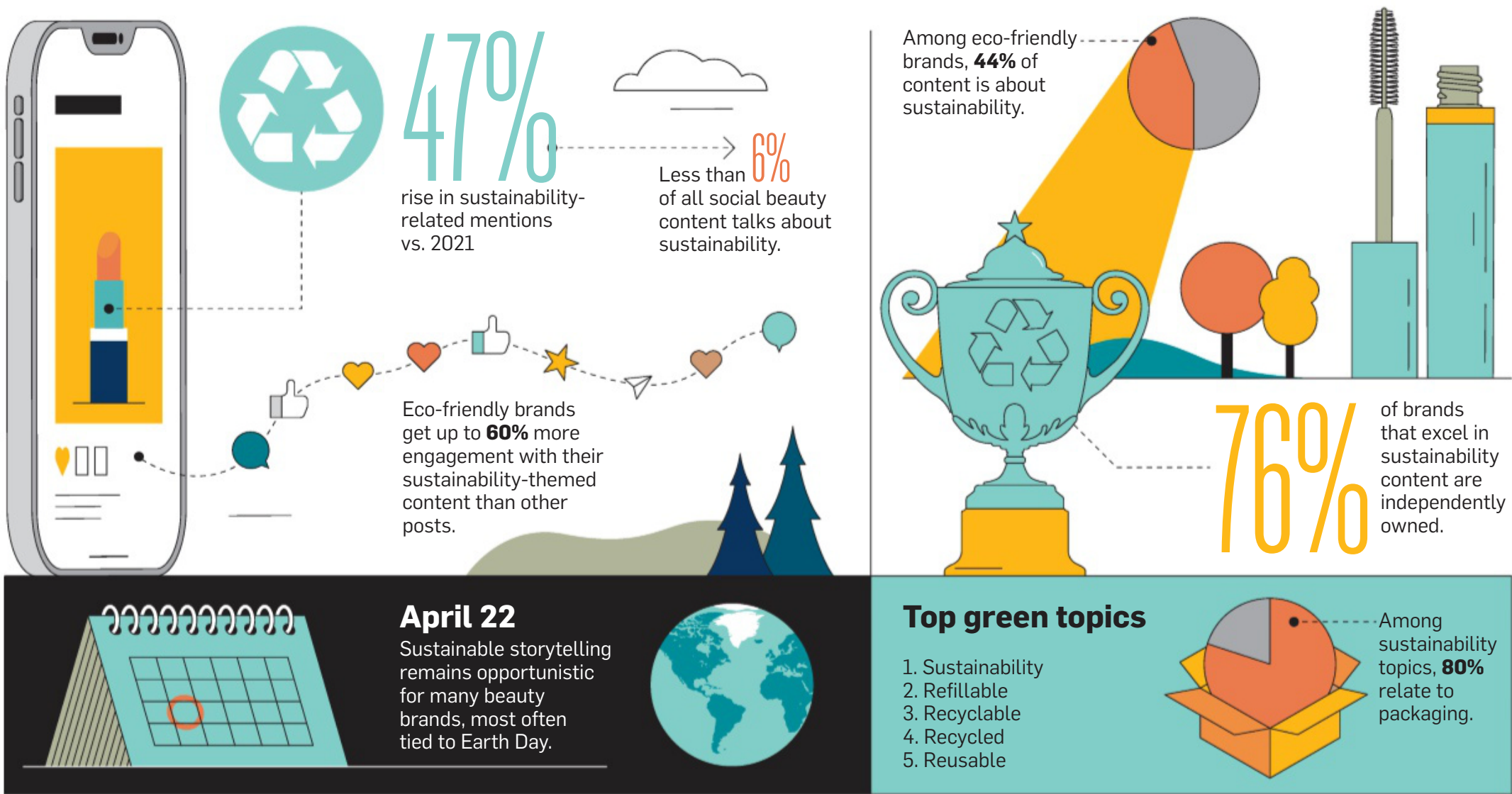
And it's not big brands leading the conversation: 76% of sustainable brands are independently owned, often by passionate founders who serve as the face of their brands, noted Carolina Bañales, founder of Eyecue Insights.

As an example, Bañales pointed to Rihanna's Fenty Beauty brand, which has been cruelty-free and all natural from its beginning in 2017. "This lends accountability to their message and allows them to be bolder in their sustainability initiatives, which can be implemented faster because of their independent nature," she said.

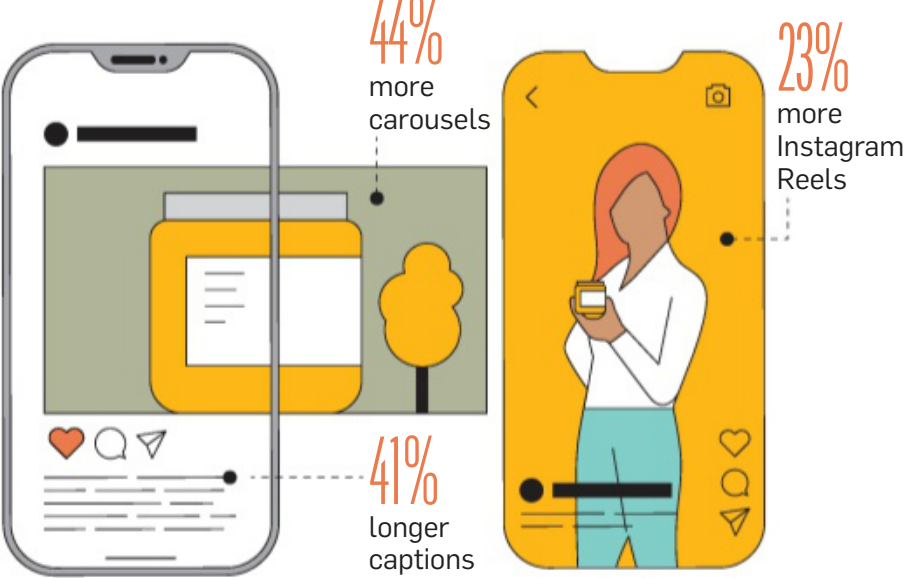
The brands leading engagement on the sustainability front also behave differently on social. They post 44% more carousels, 23% more Instagram Reels, 11% more portraits and have captions that are 41% longer than average.

Want to get in on the conversation? Bañales offered these four lessons for all beauty brands:

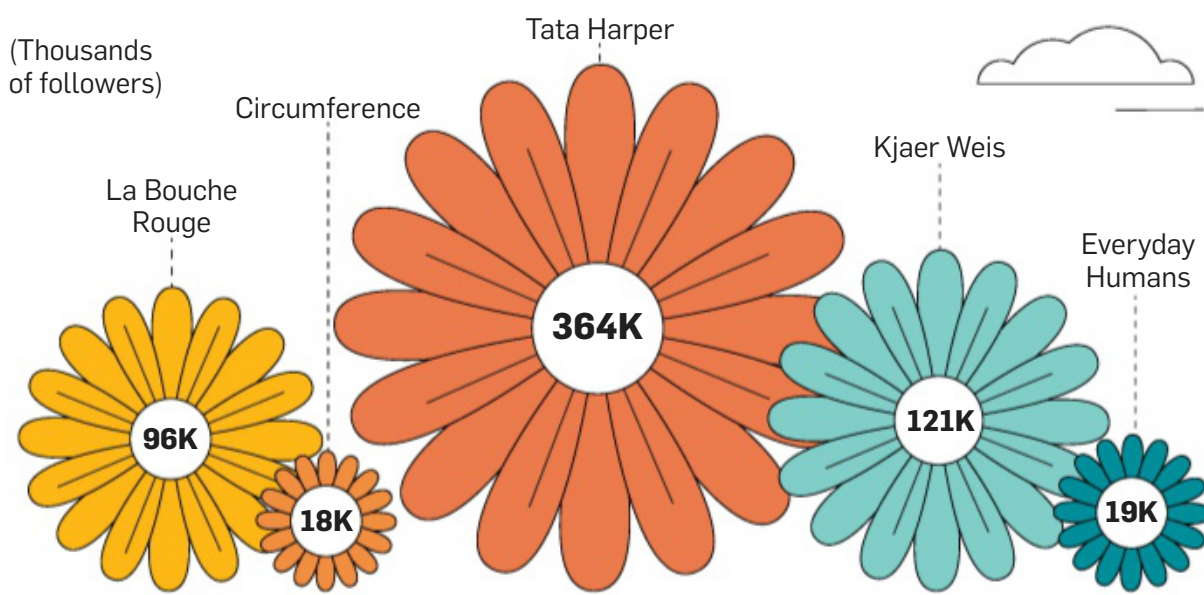
- Avoid greenwashing. Instead, pledge clear actions.
- Effective communication means explaining how consumers can do their part.
- Amplify sustainability messages with influencer and celebrity endorsements.
- Be patient. Earning credibility takes time.



Keys to social success for sustainable brands:



The brands doing it best based on engagement



REVEALING THE REAL NEW YORK

CITIZENS BANK ASKS LOCALS WHAT'S GREAT—AND NOT—ABOUT LIFE IN THE CITY.

BY EVA KIS AND LESLIE BLOUNT

“There are days when you wake up and New York City gives you the best kiss of your life, and other days you wake up and New York kicks you in the face.”

This brutal (yet accurate) assessment comes from an anonymous New Yorker in The Living Portrait of NYC, a different kind of tribute to the city.

To avoid clichés as it enters the New York metro market, Citizens Bank asked locals about what living there is really like, turning their responses into an activation about the enduring vitality of the city and its people.

The free experience, open Sept. 18-27 in Manhattan, took a year to create by Citizens' agency of record, Ogilvy, and production house Radical Media. Its four media-rich rooms span the good—like a “very unaverage cocktail” at the Algonquin Hotel—and the bad, like what New Yorkers are complaining about now (constantly updated as visitors add their own gripes).

It's all a result of extensive surveys and interviews about “what they went through to make it in New York,” said Beth Johnson, chief experience officer at Citizens Bank. “A small-business owner, a chef, someone on Wall Street: What is your New York story?”

And because the city is nothing without its performance artists, visitors will come across various acts inside the activation. “One of the things Citizens wanted to do, as a member of the community, was to support those artists,” especially in the wake of the pandemic, Johnson said.

As the bank gets more than 200 branches up and running throughout the tri-state area by 2023, Living Portrait is a chance to differentiate its message. While most banks tout retirement in their ads, “Our promise is really to help you on life's journey and throughout those moments that matter,” Johnson said. “That was brought to life in this activation by speaking to New Yorkers in an authentic way.”

Added Ogilvy president and CCO Chris Beresford-Hill: “Whether you are a brand—or even just a person—going to a new place or new market, the beautiful thing to do is to show up and listen, watch and feel the environment, rather than just announce yourself.”

IN THE LIMELIGHT
These spotlights talk: Visitors can stand in them to hear New Yorkers tell their stories. **Right page:** Each room, according to Ogilvy executive creative director Jon Wagner, is intended to echo the design of New York, using vertical and horizontal lines to emulate skyscrapers and avenues.



BEACON AWARD

from Insecure
to Empowered

ISSA RAE, ADWEEK'S 2022
BEACON AWARD WINNER,
HAS DEI IN HER DNA.

BY SHANNON MILLER
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ADRIENNE RAQUEL



IN JUNE, AT A PACKED THEATER IN THE PALAIS DES FESTIVALS ET DES CONGRÈS—THE EPICENTER OF the Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity—producer, writer, actress and entrepreneur Issa Rae sat across from Ogilvy global chief creative officer Liz Taylor. Poised and endearing, the *Insecure* creator was there to chat about bias in advertising and media.

As an in-demand creative who has turned various projects into major opportunities for marginalized talent to work in show business, Rae—who last December concluded her hit HBO comedy *Insecure* (which she co-created and starred in)—is uniquely suited to carry these conversations in any forum. In fact, she encouraged the hundreds of marketing experts in the theater to adopt her own standards for inclusion by revealing her mandate of at least 60% diverse crews on any set that she works.

“That comes from realizing my own power,” she told Taylor and the audience. “I can say no to a job if the crew is all white, which happens all the time. How is this still happening, and how do you want me to be your spokesperson for diversity when the people behind are not diverse?”

Conversely, these frequent DEI conversations, for which the multi-hyphenate receives many invites to participate, tend to place the onus of educating the white masses on people like Rae, a Black woman who is intimately acquainted with the importance of inclusion and equity.

“We task diverse people to spread the word about diversity when we know what it is already,” she explained candidly.

To support this notion, one only needs to look at her steadily expanding portfolio of original work, all of which bears similar marks of a creator with a natural eye for thoughtful storytelling. Nuanced portrayals of young Black women set against a modern-day backdrop? Check. Strong yet complex female friendships at the heart of each narrative? Absolutely. An undercurrent of the very hip-hop culture that shaped her as a per-

son? Yes, and there’s probably a banging soundtrack to prove it.

The major takeaway here: Whether you’re replaying an installment of her career-sparking, 11-year-old web series *Awkward Black Girl* or streaming the recently wrapped first season of her HBO Max original comedy *Rap Sh!t* (which was renewed for a second season), Rae has long mastered the art of telling a relatable story through an inclusive lens, building something that is all at once culturally relevant and still accessible to all.

“What I’m coming to terms with right now in [regard to] the work that I want to reflect is, I want to feel present,” Rae told Adweek. “I like creating a reflection of the times. I like holding a camera up and adding my filter to what’s culturally resonant with me.”

Beyond TV and film, Rae carries her mission of inclusion through various brand partnerships geared toward providing resources or opportunities for underrepresented creatives and entrepreneurs. American Express, clothing brand Madewell and PepsiCo’s Lifewtr are part of a growing list of brands that have aligned themselves with the Emmy-nominated performer in order to take visible steps toward equity, which speaks to her already cemented reputation of inclusion and empowerment. It’s that legacy and inarguable influence that make Rae the ideal honoree for Adweek and Adcolor’s fourth annual Beacon Award.

Rae spoke to Adweek about her community-building approach to creativity.

(This interview has been condensed and edited.)

ISSA'S ENDLESS INCLUSIVITY

As Adweek's 2017 Young Influential cover star, Rae said she had a lot of goals for the future, including finding the best way to use her voice. Since then, she's found multiple brand partnerships that have allowed her to make an impact in a unique way.



AMERICAN EXPRESS

In September 2021, the entrepreneur partnered with American Express to promote ByBlack, a dedicated certification program to aid Black-owned businesses.

GOOGLE

Rae's audio company Raedio announced a partnership with Google at the top of 2022. The effort was designed to increase the representation of women of color in the music industry.

LIFEWTR

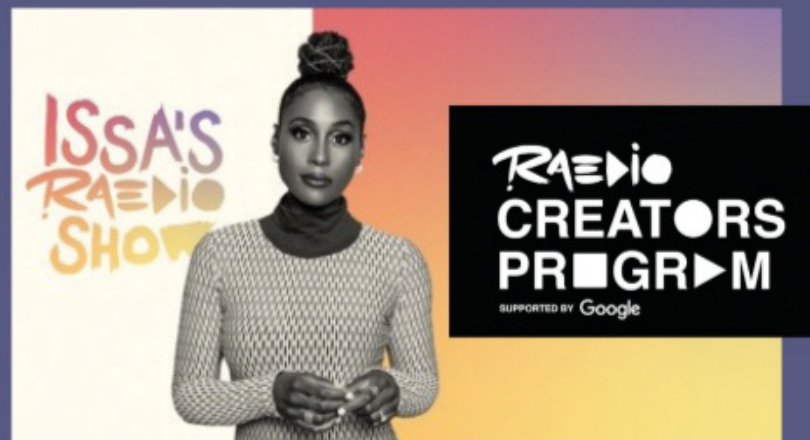
With the PepsiCo brand, Rae launched the "Life Unseen" campaign, which worked to increase inclusion within the arts. Marginalized creatives earned the chance to win a \$10,000 grant and mentorship from the star herself.

MADEWELL

The clothing brand connected with Rae's production company, ColorCreative, for its spring 2021 campaign "What Are You Made Of?" The production team featured underrepresented writers and creatives of color, keeping inclusion at the heart of the work.

COVERGIRL

After becoming an official CoverGirl brand ambassador, Rae was able to use her partnership with the legacy cosmetics brand as a platform to talk about the necessity of diverse makeup options.



**‘I overcame
those
fears
because
I was
complaining
all the
time about
what
I’m not
seeing on
television.
This
was my
opportunity
to say,
“If I can
do it, then
why isn’t
television
doing it?”’**



Adweek: More than 11 years since its debut, Awkward Black Girl still resonates as one of the first indie works starring a Black woman that explored the entertainment potential of YouTube. What was the YouTube landscape like at that time?

Issa Rae: When I started Awkward Black Girl, for me, there weren't a lot of web series that catered toward Black people. Young white college kids were making web series. There were lots of skits, animal videos and things like that. But the narrative lane was kind of wide open. I'd had the idea in my head for a very long time, but I was scared to do it. Firstly, I wanted to make it animated but didn't have the funds to make that happen. Secondly, in pursuing the live-action version [I knew I was] going to be playing the character, and I was not prepared for any potential online criticism that I was going to get as a dark-skinned woman with no hair. I was scared of what the response was going to be, regardless of whether or not I thought it was funny. But I overcame those fears because I was complaining all the time about what I'm not seeing on television. This was my opportunity to say, "If I can do it, then why isn't television doing it?"

For a lot of Black creators, artists like you and Quinta Brunson really helped build the internet-to-screen pipeline that many of today's creators can only dream of. As you've watched the social media landscape evolve since your debut, do you feel like the path you've created for yourself is still possible today?

Oh, 100%. Primarily because agents and managers have been kind of trained now to find content online, where it's fed to them on a silver platter. That is their advice to creatives: Put something online. [Film producer] Charles King put out a video where he was like, "Go make something online, and we are going to find you. That's how I found this project, because I am looking for you and I am looking for that content online." So it is 100% feasible. Now it's about building your audience and getting people to support you. People are cognizant of that, but so many people understand this now that it's a little bit harder to rise through the ranks. But it is entirely possible, especially if you're good at the internet.

The difference between me and Quinta is that she is good as fuck at the internet. For me, I got lucky early on and was more focused on building communities because that's what I felt like I was good at. Starting from Facebook onward, I [was] building these communities of friends and allies and actively engaging. And she is really funny and earnestly strategic in a way that I admire. Having worked at BuzzFeed and having been in this space

in a different way, I feel like she's so smart. She was able to use Instagram in a way that nobody else was using it. Now there's an opportunity for others to do the same things on their respective platforms. Obviously there are huge TikTok stars that are emerging, and we'll see who the next person to make that transition to television and film is going to be. It's still hard, but it's possible depending on whatever medium you choose.

Your ability to build and nurture communities throughout your career is part of this lift-as-you-climb approach where you bring along people you've worked with in the past while creating access for creators to come in behind you. How do you feel that approach has benefited your work the most?

It keeps me sane and in a happy place just by way of being around people who I'm comfortable with and whose work I admire and respect. Whether it is the present or next generation of talent, it is only making me sharper. It isn't a charity case—in my mind, these people are extremely talented and just need a platform. And on a macro scale, now we have more capable people of color in these positions so that Hollywood can't be like, "We can't find the next co-[executive producer], [executive producer] or cinematographer." It's like we're giving them a training ground and the resumé to be able to go for these bigger projects. That benefits me in the long run because then they're bringing other people on, and the network of capable talent of color is widening.

Are you still finding those same learning opportunities for yourself in the projects that you're taking part in today?

I'm learning so much. I don't know a lot on the business or even production sides. I've learned how much even [executive producer and showrunner] Prentice Penny took on while we were on Insecure that I ultimately had to take on during Rap Sh!t. I'm determined to get better, but that was eye-opening to me, how much I still don't know and have to learn. I welcome the challenge.

Your brand partnerships really reflect that community ethos as well, between your work with American Express uplifting Black businesses and your previous partnership with Lifewtr, which provided resources and mentorship for marginalized creators. Do you have a guiding philosophy when it comes to the brands that you decide to partner with?

I have to actively like the brands and appreciate what it is that they're trying to contribute, whether it's culturally or to the creative communities. I say no so quickly, and I say no to a lot.

Emmy-nominated comedy **Insecure** cemented Rae as a go-to creator of premium, inclusive television.





With HBO Max original comedy **Rap Sh!t**, Miami and female-led hip-hop get their moment in the spotlight.

If it's an opportunity to benefit other creators or put money in people of color's pockets, then I tend to listen with an open ear. And then [I learn] about what the creative is, the brand and what they've done in the past. But, yeah, it's nothing for me to say no.

When it comes to representation and inclusion in Hollywood, it can often feel as if we've been having this conversation for a millenia. Additionally, your name often comes up as an example of what inclusion could look like when someone's given the runway to create. From your perspective, what is preventing this conversation from moving forward?

It's so funny—and I tell this story all the time—when I was first starting out, around 2011, I was getting invited to panels.

'White people have to have these conversations about why [DEI is] important, and it has to affect their bottom line. If it doesn't affect their bottom line, there's no incentive.'

I was telling my mom how excited I was and she said, "That's great. What's the subject matter?" I was like, "We're just talking about how important it is to have diversity in these spaces." And she was like, "They're still talking about that? They were talking about that in the '80s." And she's so right. I don't know what has to change. I think these conversations have to be mandated in the white community.

I said this at [the Cannes Lions fireside chat]: You're preaching to the choir. Of course, Black and brown people are going to have a perspective on why there needs to be diversity because you're talking about including us. But in many cases, we don't have that power. So white people have to have these conversations about why it's important, and it has to affect their bottom line. If it doesn't affect their bottom line, there's no incentive. And that goes across the board for anything in this country. It's always gonna come down to money.

When you spoke to Adweek in 2017 for our Young Influentials issue, you talked a lot about your goals, from making movies to launching a studio to having political influence. Three years later, you founded Hoorae Media, which allows you to do all of that. Ten years from now, what do you hope the legacy of Hoorae Media will be?

I wanna have a huge impact on creatives of color—and that's something we're actively doing—but I also want to be a global brand. I want to be a global company that's Black, woman-led [and can] compete with some of the best production and media companies. And I still want to have morals with my shit. I feel like so many global media companies don't at the end of the day. It is a hard line to toe because this is all capitalistic at the end of the day. So I'm trying to move with integrity within my communities and have some respect without toeing the line of exploitation. That's something I think about constantly: how far to go. It's not something that other people who have these companies think about in the same way, I don't think. I never want to feel like I'm exploiting people, especially us.

SHANNON MILLER IS ADWEEK'S CREATIVE AND INCLUSION EDITOR. BEFORE JOINING ADWEEK IN 2021, SHANNON WAS NEWS EDITOR AT THE A.V. CLUB. @SHANNONL_MILLER

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ON THE ORIGINS OF BRANDS AND THE PEOPLE WHO BUILD THEM

THE AUDIENCE

Black-owned makeup brands offered darker shades as early as 1898, but Rihanna was the first to go big with the concept.

THE NUMBER

After a lifetime of looking, Krystal Robertson (see sidebar) found her shade with Fenty No. 110.

THE VARIETY

Initially offering some 40 shades, Fenty has since expanded to more than 50.

Fenty Beauty

HOW A CELEBRITY BRAND SHOOK UP THE COSMETICS BUSINESS, ONE SHADE AT A TIME. **BY ROBERT KLARA**

Two years ago, model and businesswoman Beverly Johnson wrote an op-ed for The Washington Post looking back on some history she had made 46 years earlier. In August 1974, Johnson became the first Black woman to be featured on the cover of Vogue magazine.

But Johnson was not in a nostalgic mood. The fashion and beauty industry, she noted, had changed little from the exclusionary place it was almost 50 years ago.

"Black culture contributes enormously to the fashion industry," Johnson wrote. "But Black people are not compensated for it. Brands do not retain and promote the many Black professionals already in the fashion, beauty and media workforce."

It's hard to find fault with Johnson's frustration at the slow pace of change. That, however, makes the singular efforts of another Black woman worth paying attention to. That is Robyn Rihanna Fenty, who found the most effective way to coax beauty brands in the direction of diversity: compete with them.

In 2017, the nine-time Grammy-winning vocalist channeled some of her star power into the creation of Fenty Beauty, a cosmetics brand founded "so that women everywhere would be included," parent company LVMH quotes Rihanna as saying. She meant it, too. Fenty Beauty launched in September 2017 with 40 shades of foundation. (It now has more than 50.)

Given the popularity Rihanna enjoys (she counts 135 million followers on Instagram), it was a given that her makeup venture would turn heads. But according to Sandy Saputo, then-CMO of Kendo Brands, under whose umbrella Fenty Beauty emerged, Rihanna had larger goals.

"Our dream was to create the biggest brand launch in beauty history," Saputo wrote in an essay for Think With Google. "What resulted is a movement that shifted the beauty industry. You really don't know it's happening until it's happened."

It all began with a one-minute debut video featuring a multiracial panoply of models including Slick Woods, Leomie Anderson and Halima Aden, the Somali-American who'd made headlines in 2016 by competing in the Miss Minnesota competition wearing a hijab and a burkini.

Then came the Fenty effect. In a single stroke, Rihanna had laid bare the beauty business' glaring deficiencies when it came to catering to a multitude of skin tones. As Glamour reported in 2018, Fenty Beauty "[has] become canon in the beauty industry and the standard of which makeup brands have been scrambling to match—or outdo."

Within weeks, establishment brands including Dior, MAC, Maybelline and CoverGirl were filling shelves with a broader range of makeup tones—at times, more than even Fenty Beauty was offering. Rihanna, however, had the advantage of having made the first move, and fans knew it. Rihanna not only uses her own brand—which has recently expanded into skin care—but she also creates tutorials on Instagram to teach others how to use the products.

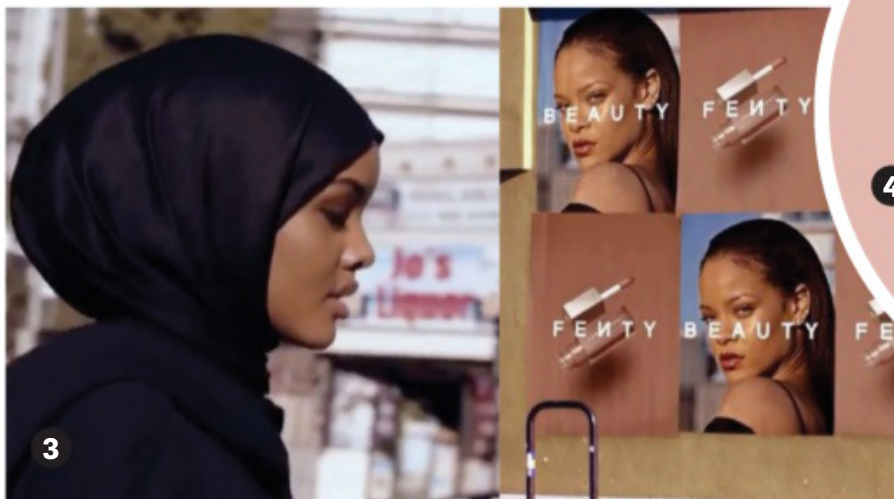
"My fans can sniff the BS from very far away," Rihanna once told The New York Times. "I cannot trick them."



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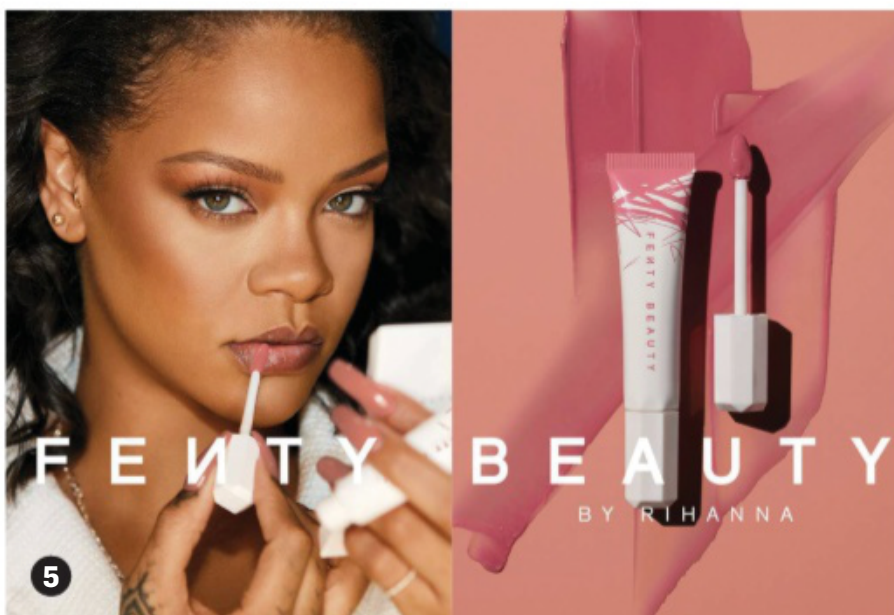
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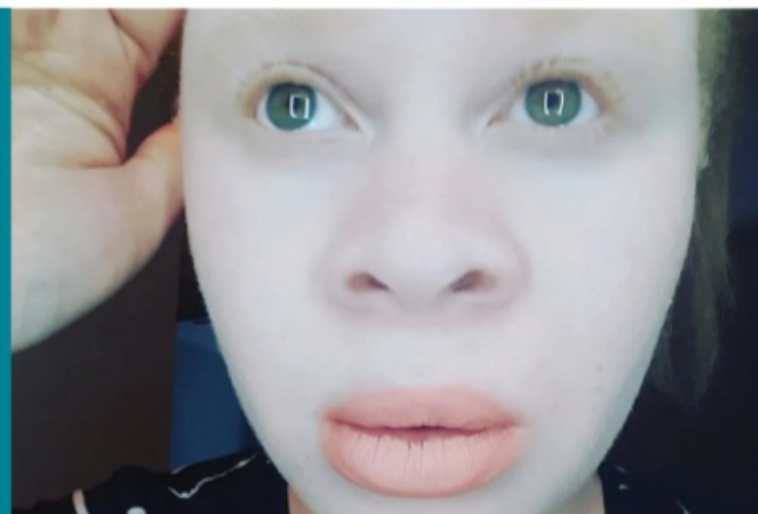
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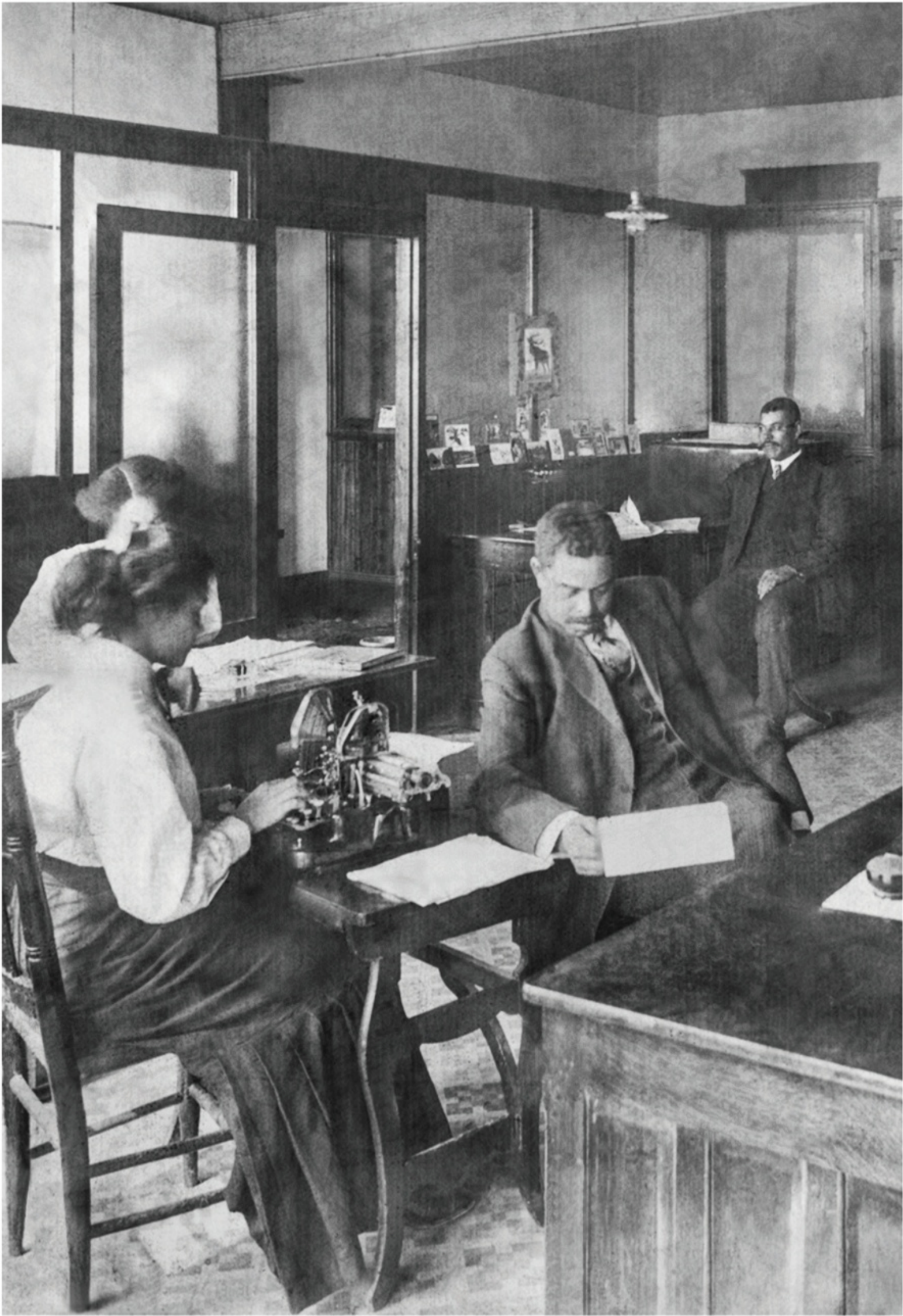
POWDER PUFF GIRL

A big reason Fenty made such a splash is because of Rihanna herself **(1)**. Born in Barbados in 1988, the vocalist found international fame in 2007 when her third album, *Good Girls Gone Bad* **(2)**, went six-times platinum after the release of the single *Umbrella*. Launched in 2017, Fenty Beauty debuted with a video that starred Somali model Halima Aden **(3)** and has since expanded from foundation to a full array of products including makeup brushes **(4)**. Rihanna is her own best product endorser, since she uses Fenty products herself **(5)**.

FREAKING OUT IN A GOOD WAY

A brand can't hope for much better than a slew of consumers singing its praises on social media—and for Fenty Beauty, that's exactly what happened. But few endorsements proved as affecting as the one posted by Krystal Robertson. As a woman with albinism, the 26-year-old nurse had given up on finding any foundation that worked with her skin tone—at least until she found shade No. 110 of Fenty Beauty's Pro Filt'r Soft Matte. "@fentybeauty I'm freaking out!!!" Robertson posted on Instagram a few weeks after the brand's launch. "Rethinking all the times I ended up orange. It's a great new world. Great job." Riri shared the post, though she'd begun to grow accustomed to responses like that. "I could never have anticipated the emotional connection that women are having with the products," she told Time magazine. "Some are finding their shade of foundation for the first time, getting emotional at the counter. That's something I will never get over."





1905

Mutually Beneficial

The concept of diversity and inclusion most often means powerful corporations hiring employees drawn from historically marginalized groups. Studies have proved that this long-overdue practice is good for business. But there's another formula for equity that's less talked about: powerful corporations that are founded and owned by people of color from the get-go. Case in point: a remarkable man named John C. Merrick, shown here in his office. Born into slavery, Merrick opened a chain of barber shops after the Civil War and used the proceeds to establish North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance in 1898. Headquartered on Durham's Parrish Street (Black Wall Street, as many called it), "The Mutual" eventually grew large enough to write group insurance for the likes of Ford Motor Co. A combination of market forces and mismanagement put the company into receivership in 2018. But for 120 years, it served—and will be remembered—as a paragon of Black enterprise. —Robert Klara



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